



Committee on **HOMELAND SECURITY** Chairman Peter T. King

Opening Statement

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Statement of Chairman Michael T. McCaul (R-TX) Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management

Field Hearing

"Using Technology to Facilitate Trade and Enhance Security at Our Ports of Entry"

**May 1, 2012
Remarks as Prepared**

The free flow of trade and commerce through our ports of entry is vital to our nation's economy. Yet today, those ports of entry have also become a route for Mexican cartels to funnel their drugs into the United States. Our federal agents have a never ending job of preventing this onslaught. Unfortunately the search for these illegal drugs has slowed down the flow of commerce, and threatens to further weaken our already fragile economy.

How much is at stake? Last year alone, \$83.4 billion of commerce came through the Laredo border crossing. The city has lived up to its distinction as "the Gateway City", boasting the busiest commercial truck crossing in the United States.

However, America's free flow of trade is threatened, because our ports of entry remain a battleground in our fight to protect the homeland.

The same ports of entry that serve as a pipeline for economic growth are inundated by illegal drug shipments. According to the Department of Justice, more than 90% of all illicit narcotics come into the United States through official ports of entry hidden among cargo and travelers.

Last year in Laredo, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers seized 21 and a half kilos of Cocaine and more than 33 kilos of Methamphetamines.

And where there are drugs flowing north, you can be sure to find guns and money flowing south.

Make no mistake; the cartels running drugs across the southwest border are highly sophisticated criminal organizations with one goal – to make as much money as possible. They will use any means necessary to ensure their poison reaches the interior of our nation.

The men and women of CBP are the last line of defense in our fight to stop the drugs from entering the United States. These officers have a difficult task: separate illicit cargo and travelers from the legitimate ones with minimal interruption to the flow of legal trade.

After September 11th, traffic across some ports of entry came to a standstill due to more detailed questioning of travelers and inspection of cargo. This resulted in long truck delays and caused plant closures, threatening companies which rely on such shipments. In the immediate aftermath of a terrorist attack, this may have been a reasonable response, but consistent delays at the border costs time and money, driving up business costs. We do not want to experience this again.

Balancing trade and security requires the smart application of technology, personnel, and infrastructure. We must adequately secure the border in order to facilitate trade.

Over the last few years the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has increased the number of CBP officers. While these men and women may be needed to address specific gaps, it is clear that we cannot secure the ports of entry only with boots on the ground.

A key to security is the maintenance and expansion of infrastructure. Our nation's ports of entry need modernization. We cannot increase capacity if there are not enough truck lanes, passenger lanes, and facilities to conduct secondary screening. Especially in these difficult budget times it is important that funds be targeted to maximize both trade and security.

New forms of technology would allow CBP to more efficiently use its manpower. Every year over 1.6 million trucks pass through the Laredo port of entry. We cannot physically inspect, or scan, every single one of these trucks. We must separate travelers and cargo through trusted shipper and traveler programs that allow CBP to focus manpower and other assets to find illicit goods and weapons.

Technologies, such as non-intrusive inspection equipment allow CBP to effectively screen the large volume of travel and commerce at the border. Additional tools, such as license plate readers give officers the ability to discern patterns from the frequency and time of crossings.

While technology has increased our ability to screen cargo and passengers more effectively, I am concerned that the Department still lacks a truly strategic approach to research and development of technologies that will enhance the way we secure ports of entry in the future. CBP lacks a technology innovation plan, which would inform industry of its technological needs, and allow industry to better recognize the needs of the Department, in a way to better leverage scarce funding.

What is missing is a strategy to secure the border, both at and between the ports of entry – technology must be an integral part of that plan.

The purpose of our hearing today is to examine ways to better utilize technology to secure our ports of entry and ensure the efficient flow of trade across our borders.

I look forward to the witness's testimony to understand the local perspective of the challenges that Laredo faces, and what the Congress can do to help.

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